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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

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R 301827Z OCT 75
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6032
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
USMISSION OECD PARIS
AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH
AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 16631

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, PDEV, UK
SUBJECT: DEVOLUTION: GOVERNMENT PLANS AND CURRENT OUTLOOK

REF: (A) LONDON 1840; (B) LONDON 11474 (SEPT. 1974);
(C) LONDON 16143

SUMMARY - AS PUBLICATION OF GOVERNMENT'S SECOND WHITE PAPER ON DEVOLUTION FOR SCOTLAND AND WALES APPROACHES, PUBLIC AND PARLIAMENTARY INTEREST IN AND SPECULATION REGARDING THIS SUBJECT HAVE INTENSIFIED. PRIME MINISTER WILSON AND OTHER GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN HAVE VIGOROUSLY RE-
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AFFIRMED GOVEPNMENT'S INTENT TO FOLLOW WHITE PAPER WITH

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LEGISLATION EARLY IN NEXT PARLIAMENT, BUT PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA CONTINUE TO FLOAT CONJECTURAL STORIES AS TO STRENGTH OF GOVERNMENT'S RESOLVE. ANTI-DEVOLUTIONISTS ON BOTH SIDES OF AISLE CLAIM TO PERCEIVE DISAGREEMENT WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT AND HOPE TO BLOCK OR AT LEAST WEAKEN THE FINAL DEVOLUTION LEGISLATION. NOT SURPRISINGLY, NATIONALIST GROUPS BELIEVE THAT FRUSTRATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL WOULD SERVE THEIR POLITICAL INTEREST. HOWEVER' THEY CANNOT AFFORD TO OPPOSE EVEN LIMITED RELINQUISHMENT OF POWER TO REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES. DETAILED CONTENT OF WHITE PAPER AND IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION ARE STILL UNKNOWN, DESPITE OFTEN CONFLICTING PRESS STORIES SUPPOSEDLY BASED ON INSIDE INFORMATION. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY TO US, HOWEVER, THAT WHITE PAPER WILL CONTAIN MAJOR DEPARTURES FROM FRAMEWORK EARLIER OUTLINED BY GOVERNMENT. IT WILL FILL IN DETAILS, LAYING GROUNDWORK FOR EXTENSIVE DEBATE AND LEGISLATION. EVENTUAL BILL WILL PROBABLY BE SHAPED BY DEBATE ITSELF. TENTATIVELY IT APPEARS THAT GOVERNMENT WILL BE ABLE TO MOVE DEVOLUTION LEGISLATION THROUGH COMMONS IN NEXT PARLIAMENT, THOUGH IT MAY HAVE TO INVOKE CLOTURE TO DO SO. END SUMMARY

1. PRIME MINISTER WILSON OCTOBER 28 TOLD COMMONS THAT GOVERNMENT WILL PUBLISH SECOND WHITE PAPER ON DEVOLUTION WITHIN NEXT FEW WEEKS AND INTRODUCE DEVOLUTION LEGISLATION EARLY IN NEXT PARLIAMENT, REAFFIRMING PREVIOUS STATEMENTS OF LEADER OF THE HOUSE SHORT AND OTHER GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN. RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS, WILSON REJECTED OPPOSITION ARGUMENT THAT CLOTURE ("GUILLOTINE") COULD NOT BE INVOKED ON CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE, NOTING THAT WHILE HE HOPED CLOTURE WOULD NOT BE NECESSARY, CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT'S USE OF THIS DEVICE ON EC LEGISLATION PROVIDED AMPLE PRECEDENT FOR SUCH ACTION ON DEVOLUTION BILL.

2. WILSON'S STATEMENT CAME AS INTENSIFIED PRESS SPECULATION ABOUT DEVOLUTION HAS SUGGESTED THAT GOVERNMENT MIGHT BE EQUIVOCATING ON ITS COMMITMENT TO TURN POWER OVER TO SCOTTISH AND WELSH ASSEMBLIES. MUCH OF THIS SPECULATION APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN INSPIRED BY ANTI-

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DEVOLUTIONISTS WHO BELIEVE TRANSFER OF EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE POWERS TO REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES WILL PLACE BRITAIN ON "SLIPPERY SLOPE" INEVITABLY LEADING TO DISSOLUTION OF UK, A FEAR THAT IS SHARED BY SOME ELEMENTS OF MEDIA AND INFORMED PUBLIC, AS WELL AS PARLIAMENT. SLIPPAGE IN GOVERNMENT'S ORIGINAL TIMETABLE -- WHITE PAPER BY MID-SUMMER 1975, FOLLOWED BY LEGISLATION IN OCTOBER -- AND REPORTS OF DISAGREEMENT WITHIN CABINET (CORRECT, BUT WE UNDERSTAND EXAGGERATED) OVER SCOPE OF POWERS TO BE DEVOLVED HAVE GIVEN SUBSTANCE TO THIS CONJECTURE. WE HAVE
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BEEN TOLD THAT DELAY WAS DUE TO COMPLEXITY OF CONSTITU-

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TIONAL AND PROCEDURAL ISSUES INVOLVED AND THAT RECALCI-
TRANT CABINET MINISTERS ACCEPTED WHITE PAPER DRAFT DURING
SPECIAL REVIEW OVER OCTOBER 25-26 WEEKEND. NEVERTHELESS,
TAM DALYELL, LABOR PARTY'S LEADING ANTI-DEVOLUTIONIST,
HAS TOLD US HE IS INCREASINGLY HOPEFUL DEVOLUTION LEGIS-
LATION CAN BE DELAYED IN PARLIAMENT LONG ENOUGH TO FORCE
GOVERNMENT TO ABANDON IT IN ORDER TO GET BALANCE OF ITS
LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM APPROVED, OR ALTERNATIVELY, TO WEAKEN
BILL TO POINT WHERE IT WILL NO LONGER REPRESENT SERIOUS
THREAT TO INTEGRITY OF UK. SIMILAR SENTIMENTS HAVE BEEN
EXPRESSED BY SOME NEWSPAPERS.

3. PRO-DEVOLUTIONISTS, AS WE HAVE REPORTED, BELIEVE
FRUSTRATION OD DEVOLUTION LEGISLATION WOULD FUEL FIRES
OF SEPARATISM, ESPECIALLY IN SCOTLAND, WHILE TRANSFER OF
SOME GOVERNMENTAL POWERS TO ASSEMBLIES WOULD DOUSE SE-
PARATIST FLAMES. SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY (SNP) SHARES
FORMER ASSESSMENT, AND MANY OF ITS SUPPORTERS WOULD LIKE
NOTHING BETTEP THAN FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO RENEGE ON ITS
DEVOLUTION PROMISE. PRO-DEVOLUTIONIST VIEW CURRENTLY
PREVAILS IN GMVERNMENT, PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY (PLP)
AND LABOR PARTY AS WHOLE. CONSERVATIVE PARTY TOO IS
FORMALLY COMMITTED TO DEVOLUTION, THOUGH THERE ARE SIGNS
OF BACKBENCH WAVERING AND SOME QUESTION AS TO WHETHER
TORIES WILL GO AS FAR IN THIS DIRECTION AS GOVERNMENT.

4. ULTIMATE CONTENT OF WHITE PAPER IS STILL UNKNOWN TO
PUBLIC, DESPITE FREQUENT AND OFTEN CONFLICTING PRESS AC-
COUNTS WHICH ARE PURPORTEDLY BASED ON INSIDE INFORMATION.
FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH OFFICIALS DIRECTLY INVOLVED,
WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE SIGNIFICANT DEPARTURES FROM DEVOLU-
TION FRAMEWORK EARLIER OUTLINED IN INITIAL WHITE PAPER
(REF A) AND LABOR PARTY POLICY STATEMENT (REF B) -- E.G.
ASSEMBLIES WILL NOT HAVE INDEPENDENT REVENUE SOURCE.
NEW WHITE PAPER, HOWEVER, IS EXPECTED TO CONTAIN INSTI-
TUTIONAL AND PROCEDURAL DETAILS, PROVIDING AMPLE BASIS
FOR DEBATE AND LEGISLATION. WILSON TOLD COMMONS THAT
DRAFTING OF LEGISLATION HAD COMMENCED, BUT INDICATED
GOVERNMENT WOULD BE WILLING TO MAKE REASONABLE ACCOMMO-
DATIONS. ACCMRDINGLY, WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE SHAPE
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OF LEGISLATION WILL BE PARTIALLY DETERMINED BY WHITE
PAPER DEBATE.

5. ASSUMING DEVOLUTION LEGISLATION IS INTRODUCED BY
MARCH, AS WILSON INDICATED, AND THERE IS NO DRAMATIC RE-
VERSAL OF PARLIAMENTARY OPINION, GOVERNMENT HAS BETTER
THAN EVEN CHANCE OF PUSHING LEGISLATION THROUGH COMMONS
DURING NEXT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT, THOUGH IT MAY HAVE TO

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COMPROMISE SOME OF ITS INITIAL POSITIONS AND INVOKE CLO-
TURE TO DO SO. THE TENTATIVE OUTLOOK IN THE HOUSE OF
LORDS IS MORE PROBLEMATICAL, AND WILL BE INFLUENCED BY
THE OUTCOME OF THE CURRENT COMMONS/LORDS DEADLOCK ON THE
"PRESS FREEDOM" ISSUE (REF C), AS WELL AS LEVEL OF SUP-
PORT FOR DEVOLUTION BILL IN COMMONS. ONCE WHITE PAPER IS
PUBLISHED, WE WILL HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO GAUGE PARLIAMEN-
TARY REACTION AND REEVALUATE THIS TENTATIVE ASSESSMENT.

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